

FAMILY REUNION SERVICES

Family Reunion Services (FRS) is a short-term, intensive, family-based program designed to reunify children who are in out-of-home care and who, without intensive intervention, are likely to remain in care longer than six months. The goals of FRS are to assist a family in removing barriers for the return of their child(ren), assist in the transition of returning the child(ren) to the family, and to develop a plan with the family that will maintain the child(ren) safely in the home for at least one year following the intervention.

The target populations for FRS are children and their families for whom it would be unlikely that reunification would occur prior to a six-month period without intensive services. Selection of this population targets families who are in greatest need. This avoids focusing on children who are placed in care and, through standard procedures, would return home within six months without intensive intervention. Selection of this population is based on the finding that the likelihood for reunification decreases significantly for children who remain in out-of-home care beyond a six-month period. Children who remain in out-of-home care for such a length of time have a greater probability of experiencing multiple alternative care placements. Through the efforts of the FRS program, it is hoped that the risk of such foster care drift will be significantly reduced.

Safety of all family members is the concern of FRS, moreover, safety of the child is the primary consideration. FRS does not advocate returning a child to a high-risk situation; rather, the goal is to modify the home environment or behavior of family members so that the child can return and remain safely at home. Safety of the child is continually assessed throughout the FRS intervention. If at any time it is determined that a child is at risk of maltreatment, a recommendation for immediate removal is made.

Families are eligible to receive FRS if at least one child (0-17years) under Children's Division custody is in an out-of-home placement. Four (4) new contracts were awarded February 2005 in the St. Louis Metro Region and Kansas City, for a total of 18 contracted FR specialists. There are currently 26 FRS specialists, in-house and contracted, positioned throughout the state with the capacity to serve approximately 390 families during SFY-05.

The St. Louis Metro Family Reunion site has been participating in a pilot project sponsored by the National Family Preservation Network in conjunction with Dr. Ray Kirk of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. This pilot is testing a pre- and post- family functioning scale in three sites across the country. The North Carolina Family Functioning Scale- Family Reunion is being utilized for a pre and post functioning scale to measure changes in family functioning during an FRS intervention. The final report was available in July 2002 (www.nfnp.org); this tool has shown to be helpful in guiding specialists through a comprehensive

assessment. Tentatively, this tool will be used statewide and will continue to collect the data for continued program improvement. The tool is currently required to be used by all of the contracted FRS agencies. A fully implemented EXCEL database is scheduled to be completed in May 2005. This database will be utilized pending completion of SACWIS database.